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On “growing up” with QROM: invited contribution for the anniversary issue

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On 'growing up' with QROM: Anniversary Issue

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Abstract:

Purpose: To reflect on the experience of 'growing up' with QROM in celebration of the tenth anniversary of the journal.

Design/methodology/approach: Personal reflection.

Findings: Reading, writing and reviewing for QROM has given me the inspiration and confidence to develop my own qualitative research practice, but I hope it doesn't stop there. I look forward to the next ten years.

Originality/value: To revisit the editors' original question and ask: why do we still need QROM?

In an academic sense, I have grown up with QROM. The first issue arrived when I had just emerged from the year-long ethnographic study that formed the basis of my PhD and I eagerly consumed the reflections it contained (Van Maanen, 2006; Boje, 2006; Bryman and Cassell, 2006). In contrast to materials I had consulted up until that point (textbooks, more generic qualitative journals and the very occasional qualitative methods article in mainstream management journals) QROM offered more engaging, reflexive and challenging accounts of research practice. QROM certainly started as it meant to go on. Over the intervening years it has continued to provide an essential forum for debate about and reflection on the 'meaty issues' of qualitative research in management and organisation studies. In case I am ever wavering, reading QROM acts to remind me why I do qualitative research and why, just occasionally, it is actually fun or even worthwhile.

At the time of that first issue I was (as I know now is the way with many PhD students) overwhelmingly concerned with getting my research 'right'. The problem, it seemed to me at the time, was finding out what 'right' meant so I could ensure that I followed the correct process and delivered the desired outcome. As I have 'grown up' (I'm not really going to bring age into this, you can read <https://ageatwork.wordpress.com/> to find out why), worked in some very different institutions, on different shapes and sizes of research projects and deployed an ever increasing array of qualitative approaches, my views have changed. But many of the frustrations remain. Therefore I want to return

and rephrase the question that Cathy and Gillian posed in their first editorial (Cassell and Symon, 2006) to ask: Why do we still need QROM? There are of course many possible answers to this question and below I propose only three.

A key concern in 2006 was the invisibility of qualitative research. My perception (and I haven't got any numbers to support it) is that this has changed somewhat but not nearly enough. Some aspects of qualitative research still lurk in the shadows. There is simply not the room either intellectually or physically within the constraints imposed by the expectations of the 'traditional' empirical article in many journals to explore in depth many issues that perplex us as qualitative researchers. It is true that good methodological papers do now get published in the more mainstream management journals but they are relatively few and far between. Even those that do appear in the four-star titles we are told to aspire to often seem to be presented as 'expert' accounts. Ironically perhaps, these expert accounts that offer a glimpse of the 'right' way to conduct research would have appeared as a godsend during my PhD. However, these accounts often miss the reflexive engagement on research practices that seems to be a particular strength of much of what is published in QROM. From my personal perspective, articles in QROM seem to unpack the intricacies and delicacies of qualitative research. QROM offers a methodologically rich menu rather than the rushed (fast food) accounts we all often construct when publishing elsewhere. I am as guilty as any of turning first to the methodology section when I set about cutting the (usually vast) excess word count from a paper prior to submission. It is important to recognise the role of the journal, its editors, board and reviewers in this process. A final published article is shaped considerably by the review process and while we authors have a role to play, our research is often squeezed when it should be expanded or simplified when it should be complicated. This is where QROM excels in working with authors to tease out methodological nuggets and polish them until they shine.

The second reason we still need QROM are the developing challenges that qualitative researchers in organisational and management face. It is trite to say that the world of work is changing, but it is. How we research it is also therefore open to change. This is an exciting and challenging opportunity. Qualitative researchers are embracing this opportunity in expanding our methodological repertoire and extending the range of approaches we can bring to understand work and workers. Whether it is in the increasing application of visual methods (Davison et al., 2012) or developing and adapting ethnographic approaches (Donnelly et al., 2013, McDonald and Simpson, 2014). In both Special Issues and regular editions QROM has provided an opportunity to try out, play and explore, allowing also for critique and debate about new developments in qualitative methods. This opportunity will continue to be critical as we develop our methods and take advantage of new technologies that are impacting both work and research practice (Pritchard, 2011; Pritchard and Whiting, 2012). QROM will undoubtedly provide a space for the discussion of such opportunities into the future, and I would encourage to it to foster these debates in other spaces too including the virtual (via twitter for example) and not-so-virtual (via conferences and debates).

My third and final answer to the question of why we still need QROM relates to my own experiencing of publishing in the journal. I do not pretend to be an expert in this area; like many of us I have experienced some successes and some unmitigated disasters in the publishing arena. My experience of QROM however has largely been different from that of submitting papers elsewhere. In essence this seems to relate to the broader philosophy of the journal to provide a voice for qualitative researchers. It seems then that no matter what the angle or aspect of qualitative research an author

might wish to explore, it will get a fair hearing at QROM. It is the process of that 'hearing' that I think is so critical to the success of QROM. Each time I have been through the review process it has been particularly challenging but also exceptionally supportive. Reviewers have pushed me to examine (expose, even) my own methodological assumptions and actively reflect on these within my writing. If we as qualitative researchers have helped make QROM, the editors and reviewers have, to my mind, played an equally important role. This relies on the hard work of a few and the good will of many to continue to give up their time to act as reviewers, a commitment increasingly hard in the changing political and economic context of academic life.

I started this piece by saying I have grown up with QROM, which might suggest that my growing is done. It is not. Reading, writing and reviewing for QROM has given me the inspiration and confidence to develop my own qualitative research practice, but I hope it doesn't stop there. I look forward to the next ten years. I will be quite the old lady by then.

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